


# Chapter 15

## Service–Learning as an Active Learning Methodology for Enhancing Sustainability in Business Education

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### ABSTRACT

*Achieving the goals set out in the 2030 Agenda to mitigate social and environmental challenges represents a significant undertaking that requires the active involvement of multiple stakeholders. Among these, universities are well-positioned to serve as key spaces where future business leaders can acquire both theoretical and experiential knowledge. In this context, our purpose is twofold: first, to deepen students' understanding of inequality, poverty, and food waste within the Bachelor's Degree in Business Administration at the University of Salamanca; and second, to foster the acquisition of competencies related to sustainability in general, and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in particular. Our findings highlight the benefits of*

DOI: 10.4018/979-8-3373-1937-7.ch015

*applying active learning methodologies in enhancing students' understanding of sustainability and in developing soft skills such as personal autonomy and social empathy within the Business Administration degree programme.*

## **INTRODUCTION**

Sustainable development aims to protect the planet while mitigating social inequalities. The 2030 Agenda offers a transformative action plan consisting of 17 SDGs and 169 integrated and indivisible targets, addressing social, economic, and environmental dimensions. However, annual monitoring reports consistently indicate that progress remains insufficient to meet these commitments. According to the Europe Sustainable Development Report (2025), the European Union faces five major challenges in implementing the SDGs, with the eradication of poverty and achieving zero hunger being among the most pressing. The report highlights stagnation, and in some cases regression, in indicators related to the principle of “leaving no one behind”—which measure inequalities in opportunity, well-being, and access to services—directly affecting progress on SDG 1 (No Poverty). Similarly, persistent challenges are noted in SDG 2 (Zero Hunger), particularly in the transition to sustainable food and land-use systems. SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities) also shows signs of stagnation, with the report noting that income inequality and access to quality services have not improved significantly across the EU since 2020. Notably, Spain, despite having a relatively high Leave-No-One-Behind Index score (76.9), continues to face substantial challenges in ensuring equal access to opportunities and reducing poverty and deprivation among vulnerable populations.

More broadly, while all 17 SDGs are relevant, the report underscores that several goals demand urgent attention in the European context. These include SDG 1, 2, and 10, as well as SDG 13 (Climate Action), SDG 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production), and SDG 16 (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions), where progress has been particularly slow or even regressive. The European average SDG Index score stands at 72.8 out of 100, and even the highest-performing countries face significant challenges, receiving red ratings in at least two goals. Spain, although above the European average in some indicators, still contends with persistent inequalities and difficulties in ensuring food security and poverty reduction across all regions and social groups. These findings suggest that no European country is fully on track to meet the 2030 Agenda, and that urgent, coordinated efforts are needed at national, regional, and local levels to reverse stagnation and accelerate meaningful progress across the full spectrum of the SDGs.

In this regard, various studies (e.g. Christl et al., 2024) have pointed out that the measures implemented in response to the COVID-19 pandemic—such as lock-

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